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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1488  
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [BG](#)  
SUBJECT: QUAD "TEA GROUP" DISCUSSES ELECTIONS WITH PM'S  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISOR

REF: A. 06 OTTAWA 06186

[1](#)B. 06 DHAKA 03870

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia Butenis; reason 1.4(d)

[1](#)1. (C) Ambassador hosted a dinner for Reaz Rahman, the Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Advisor, on July 9. British High Commissioner Anwar Chowdhury and Australian High Commissioner Doug Foskett also attended. (Canadian High Commissioner remains out of the country.) The purpose of the dinner was to brief Rahman on the outcome of the Ottawa meeting on South Asia held on May 26, 2006. (Reftels)

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador briefly summarized the key discussion points regarding Bangladesh. She stressed that Bangladesh was not the only agenda item, that the participants at the May 26 meeting (US, UK, Australia and Canada) were friends of Bangladesh, and that they were committed to supporting the electoral process and the GOB's counter-terrorism efforts.

GOB SENSITIVITIES

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[1](#)3. (C) Rahman, a retired career diplomat and friendly toward the U.S., cautioned that as the time for the caretaker government neared, the GOB's sensitivity about ambassadors speaking out would only increase. He said that the BNP already felt that the line had been crossed several times, and that "the Prime Minister was pretty upset." He specifically cited a television interview by the British HC on July 7 (the anniversary of the London bombings) and the Ambassador's visits to victims of political violence. Rahman said that the BNP was particularly sensitive to public discussion of "political violence" because this was used by India as justification for demanding the cancellation of the SAARC summit in Dhaka last November.

[1](#)4. (C) Regarding the Parliamentary Standing Committee's denunciation of "meddlesome diplomats" and call for their expulsion, Rahman said that he had explained to the MPs that other countries were naturally interested in developments and that in any event, PNGing diplomats in Dhaka would result in retaliation toward GOB diplomats. Nonetheless Rahman felt that the ambassadors should "tone it down." He said that it was better to be more careful, even if pressed by our capitals, or the "reservoir of goodwill" would disappear and we would be misinterpreted as siding with the Awami League (AL).

FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS

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15. (C) Rahman went on to say that the BNP did not appreciate calls for "free and fair elections," given that Bangladesh has already had three successful elections. Diplomats should stop saying that a free and fair election is crucial to the country's future. "We know this already, and many people say it's the only good thing we've had in the past 15 years."

16. (C) On the election, Rahman said that if the election were held now, the BNP and its coalition would win an absolute majority. He also questioned why the AL was so concerned about the role of the military during the elections, since several AL MPs were former army officers, and people do not generally view the military as pro-BNP.

17. (C) COMMENT: The discussion was quite friendly and the ambassadors made the point that while the BNP may have confidence in a free and fair election, the opposition did not, and was pressuring the international community to speak out. At the end of the evening the Australian HC perfectly captured the atmosphere of political discussion in Bangladesh: "If you are truly impartial, you will agree with me." END COMMENT.  
BUTENIS